

Understanding Culturally Responsive Teaching

in the DYS English Language Arts Classroom

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Understanding Culturally Responsive Teaching in the DYS English Language Arts Classroom



As educators teaching youth in the DYS system, we have the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of students, particularly at a time when they deeply need someone to invest in them.

A basic premise of being a teacher is that we engage in meaningful interactions with students and create a learning environment in which every student participates and succeeds. How we prepare, the content we teach, and how we interact

all have powerful effects on how students learn and see themselves as learners. Our interactions with students constantly inform not just their mastery of content, but also the ways they self-identify as learners and their academic self-esteem.

Culturally responsive teaching involves reflecting on the ways in which we interact with our students, and they interact with one another, to form positive and affirming experiences. The student population in DYS represents a broad range of ages, varied learning styles, multiple intelligences, diverse learning strengths, and wide-ranging cultural and educational backgrounds. The amount of time for which students are in the care and treatment of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services also varies greatly, and can range from days to years, with students sometimes moving among more than one DYS facility.

Relationships are crucial to effective teaching, and learning about our students is critical to building relationships. While certain factors may limit our students' opportunities to engage in sustained study with a cohort of peers and build relationships with their teachers, we can build strong relationships with the young people in our classrooms.

Fostering meaningful connections, and teaching curriculum that strengthens our students' abilities to engage with the world and become successful in their lives, requires us as educators to participate in ongoing reflection on:

- How we **prepare** and design our teaching
- ▼ How we **connect** content to our students' lives
- ◆ How we **interact** with our students

In 1992, a research study demonstrated that juvenile treatment centers that employ effective teachers have lower recidivism rates than other treatment centers (Bortner and Williams). In that study, "effective" was defined in much the same way that we define "culturally responsive." ***Culturally responsive teaching holds the promise of making a real difference in the lives of all our students.***

Understanding Culturally Responsive Teaching in the DYS English Language Arts Classroom (continued)

WHAT IS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING?

Culturally responsive teaching involves linking curriculum to our students' lives in authentic and meaningful ways for the purpose of helping students achieve success.

To be culturally responsive educators means getting to know our students, and learning how our students' experiences and identities have shaped the way they see the world. It involves developing an awareness of how we view our own world and how this influences our way of teaching. When we build connections between our students' worlds and our own and use these connections to inform our teaching, our students can see themselves as active and valued participants in the learning community (Nieto).

Cultural responsiveness means examining our own cultural norms and how these affect our teaching. Responsive teaching requires that we have an understanding of how our personal, academic and cultural experiences are different from those of our students (Melnick and Zeichner; Zeichner). Much of what we do and say has been formed by the political and social context in which we live and work (Nieto). If left unexamined, these differences can lead to a mismatch between our students' prior experiences and the classroom experience we offer. Culturally responsive teaching involves learning about specific elements of our students' lives, and using what we learn to guide curriculum and instruction.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS DEPENDS ON EXAMINING:

- The prior experiences, backgrounds and cultural norms of our students;
- Ways to understand and use students' experiences as important and highly valuable resources;
- How students from diverse backgrounds learn best;
- How our own experiences, backgrounds and cultural norms (in and out of the classroom) influence or impact our work with youth.

Taking time to reflect on these elements allows us to understand perspectives and ways of being that differ from our own. When teachers are aware of cultural differences, we have the potential to make a meaningful difference in our students' lives, even if a student is with us for only a short time. ***Cultural responsiveness expands our capacity to make learning meaningful and successful for every learner every day.*** It affirms our belief in our students' potential and possibilities, as well as our roles in shaping students' identities as learners.

And ultimately, culturally responsive teaching, when employed comprehensively, not as a stand-alone strategy, is transformative and emancipatory. For example, when the dynamic structures of African-American English (also known as Black English) are valued, classrooms transform into vibrant communities where African-American learners feel free to express and learn in ways that reflect their cultural values. Other cultural groups may prefer smaller group, individualized instruction. It is the acknowledgement of these various and sometimes competing cultural priorities that transforms teachers and students alike into engaged participants in the learning process. Geneva Gay states, **"The validation, information, and pride it generates are both psychologically and intellectually liberating."**

Overview—Preparing, Connecting, Interacting

WE CAN PREPARE TO TEACH BY:

- Thinking about the language objectives for the lesson and then determining what kind of supports might be needed for English Language Learners;
 - Reflecting on ourselves and how our own cultural norms affect the ways we teach and interact with students;
 - Learning about and valuing our students' previous experiences and cultural backgrounds;
 - Acknowledging what we do and don't know about our students and their lives;
 - Increasing our awareness of assumptions we make about our students and how they influence our interactions;
 - Becoming purposeful about the verbal and non-verbal messages we send to students;
 - Investigating the experiences and contributions of students' cultural groups throughout history in ways that highlight the engagement of and agency (or power) of people to impact their own lives and futures, not solely their oppression;
 - Researching how to match instruction with students' cultural norms, or participating in site-based inquiry groups around matching instruction with students' cultural norms.
-

WE CAN CONNECT CONTENT TO OUR STUDENTS' LIVES BY:

- ▼ Working from students' prior knowledge;
 - ▼ Employing themes that will help students understand their own histories and see themselves in the curriculum;
 - ▼ Addressing cultural diversity, power, privilege and racism in society;
 - ▼ Working to meet students' diverse cultural and academic learning styles;
 - ▼ Remaining flexible, creative, organized, and enthusiastic;
 - ▼ Challenging students through a rigorous curriculum and promoting their critical thinking;
 - ▼ Applying ELA skills, knowledge, and analysis to life outside the classroom.
-

WE CAN INTERACT EFFECTIVELY WITH OUR STUDENTS BY:

- ◆ Building relationships based on mutual respect;
- ◆ Respecting students' life experiences and cultural norms;
- ◆ Creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere;
- ◆ Implementing firm, consistent, high expectations for behavior and academic achievement;
- ◆ Seeing each student as an important member of the classroom community with strength and knowledge to contribute;
- ◆ Creating opportunities for all students to participate and bring their strengths to classroom activities.

How We Prepare and Design Our Teaching



We become culturally responsive in our pedagogy by addressing how we prepare, how we connect ELA content to our students' lives, and how we interact with our students.

The following sections explore three key elements of culturally responsive teaching—Preparing, Connecting, and Interacting—through questions, examples, research, and specific tools that teachers can use to deepen their effectiveness as culturally responsive

educators. The first of these elements—How we prepare and design our teaching—begins with the most basic question:

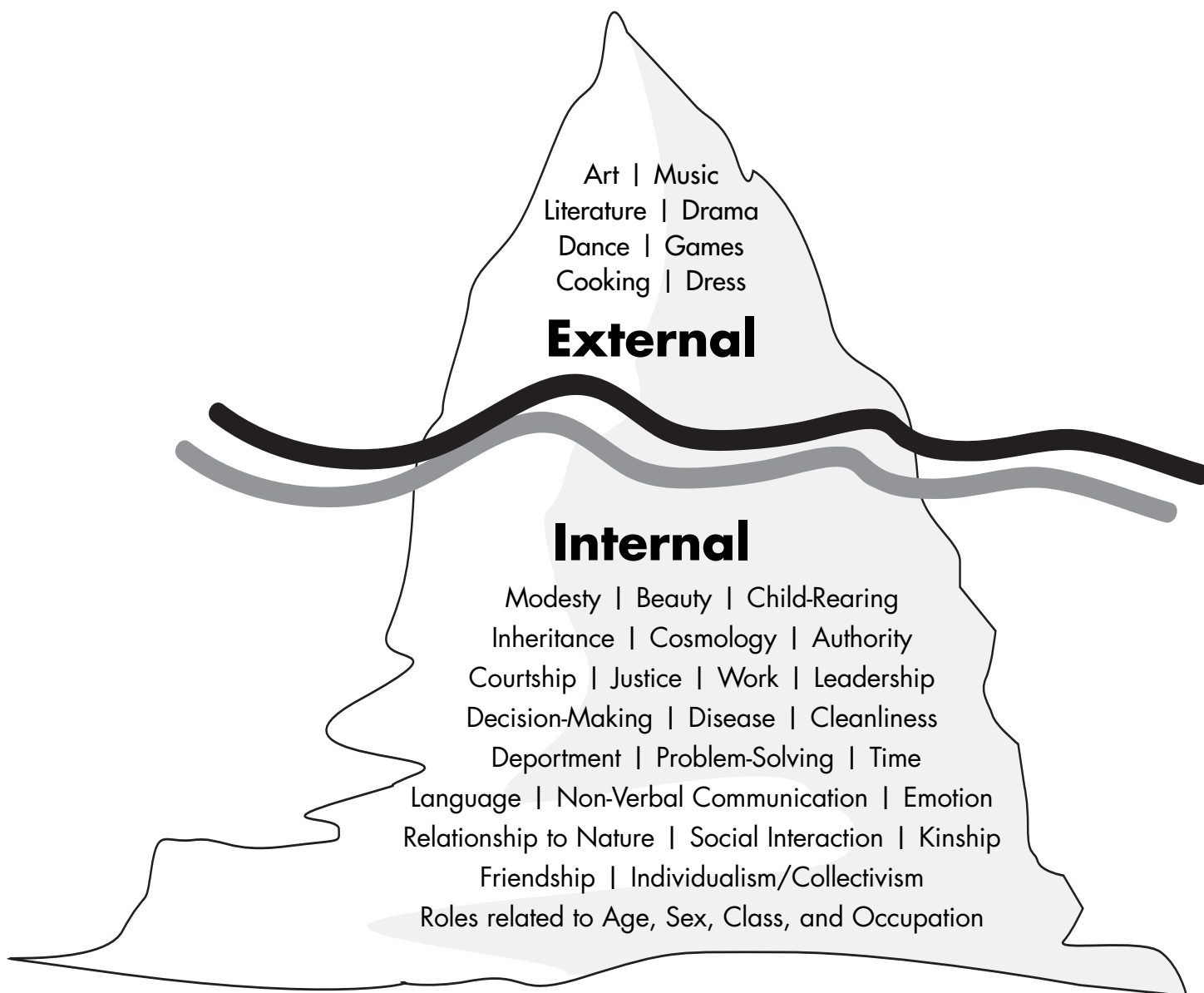
WHO AM I?

In preparing to teach students, we must first know ourselves. Whatever our personal, cultural, or academic backgrounds are, every one of us has norms and practices that we express through the ways we talk, what we know and value, and how we behave and teach. How can we understand the practices and beliefs of our students without understanding the practices and beliefs that we embrace ourselves? ***Becoming aware of our own beliefs and behaviors is essential to understanding how they affect our students.***

Consider, for example, how a teacher may see one circumstance differently than a student because of their respective cultural lenses. Linguistic anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath's ethnographic research published in ***Ways with Words*** takes a deeper look at how children's language development is affected by the cultural communities they grow up in. In the 1970s, she compared the two working class communities of Roadville and Trackton in the Piedmont Carolinas. Roadville was a predominantly White community and Trackton was predominantly African-American. One of the things she found was that the language expectations of the schools and teachers were different from the values and expectations of the home communities. She also noticed that teachers had to change the style of directions they gave to their students in order to accommodate children who did not seem to "pick up" on subtle pragmatic cues, and needed to be told explicitly what was expected of them. When looking at classroom management issues, she contrasts the communities' conceptions of time. Students from Trackton, who were brought up in a community that fed them when they were hungry, and let them sleep when they were tired, were not accustomed to a regimented schedule. This proved to be quite frustrating for teachers, and many found themselves changing their approaches to communicating with their students. This example of taking the time to understand the multiple ways in which daily activities can be viewed demonstrates the implications of this research. ***Deepening our understanding of the practices and beliefs we practice and how they are similar and different to those of our students, allows us to begin to look at the tensions that might arise in our classrooms with a more informed lens.***

CULTURAL “ICEBERG”

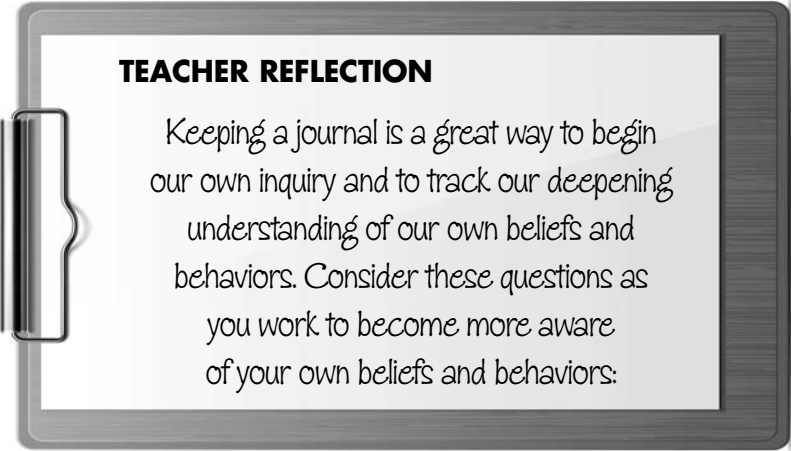
Many times we limit our understanding of culture to the things we can see, taste, and touch. But more often than not, when there is a cultural conflict, it is rooted in the unseen priorities of a culture. For example, one culture’s notion of “fair” may come in direct opposition to another’s. The concept of an iceberg—a large mass that is simultaneously visible and invisible—is useful in illustrating how certain aspects of culture are primarily **in awareness**, while other significant aspects of culture are primarily **out of awareness**. The illustration below was adapted from Gary Weaver in R.M. Paige, editor, *Cross-Cultural Orientation: New Conceptualizations and Applications* (“Cultural Iceberg”).



Nine-tenths of an iceberg is out of sight

In this analogy, parts of the iceberg are external; they are conscious, explicitly learned, and easily changed. We can see, hear, and touch these aspects of culture. Other aspects of culture are internal; they are unconscious, implicitly learned, and difficult to change. **Many of these internal components, such as beliefs, values, thought patterns, and myths, are especially powerful aspects of culture.** To learn more about this Iceberg Analogy of Culture, see Gary R. Weaver, editor, *Culture, Communication and Conflict: Readings in Intercultural Relations*, 2nd edition.

TEACHER REFLECTION



Keeping a journal is a great way to begin our own inquiry and to track our deepening understanding of our own beliefs and behaviors. Consider these questions as you work to become more aware of your own beliefs and behaviors:

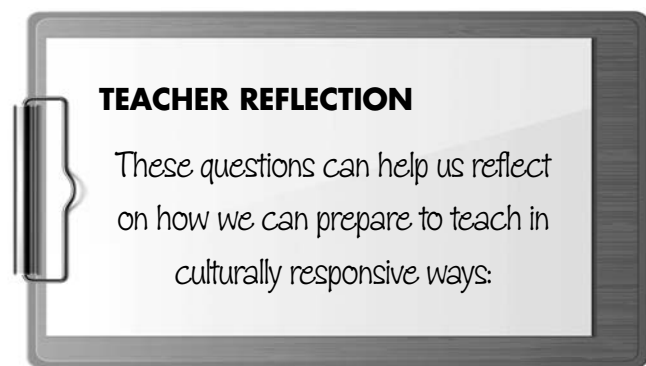
1. What experiences did I have as a student in school? Were they positive? Negative? Varied?
2. What made them positive or negative?
3. What experiences did I have with teachers in school?
4. Is there a pattern or “trend”?
5. What does “learning” mean to me?
6. At what points in my life has “learning” been most interesting? At what points has it felt like a chore?
7. How do I learn best? Reading? Writing? Practicing? Teaching? Other ideas?
8. What was my family life like as an adolescent?
9. How did I relate to my peers? How did I relate to adults?
10. What have my experiences been with the police? Courts? The criminal justice system?
11. How often does my race, culture, or gender affect my daily life?
12. When I was an adolescent, how often did I think about race, culture, or gender?
13. What relationships do I have with people whose race or culture are different from my own?

WHO ARE MY STUDENTS?

After working with young people for a period of time, sometimes we think we know them. But as educators, it is important that we continually reflect on ourselves and the young people we teach. The more we understand who our individual students are, the better we can build on their own strengths to help meet their needs.

In DYS settings, there are limits to the subjects we can discuss with students. While the circumstances of our students' detention is not an area for us to explore, we can ask our students about their personal interests, talents, and backgrounds. How much do we know about the talents they bring to the classroom and the interests that motivate them? Do we know the cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds of our students? Are we familiar with their communities? Having this knowledge can help teachers develop lessons that build on students' prior knowledge, experiences, and cultural learning or communication styles. As students make connections to their own lives, they become better able to transfer concepts for future learning.

Before we can identify how to teach our students, we must learn more about who they are. While this can be a challenge in DYS settings, with a transient and geographically diverse student body, it is essential that we are creative and resourceful in collecting information that will help us understand and teach our students. A teacher at a detention program, for example, may find the use of prompts to be useful even if the student only stays for one day; a teacher at a treatment center, on the other hand, may use more involved techniques including informal surveys or conferences with students. Making the effort to learn more about our students and their communities helps us prepare ourselves and become better teachers. If we are to link the curriculum to our students' lives in authentic and meaningful ways, we must acknowledge and address what we do—and do not—know about the individual learners in our classrooms.



1. How do I use prompts and other activities to gain an understanding about students' home culture and life experiences? What else could I do?
2. When new students come into my classroom, what information or resources do I use to resist making assumptions about them?
3. How do I ask my students about their previous experiences in school? What else could I do?
4. How do I research my students' ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds using a variety of resources (e.g., written texts, conversations or presentations by members of their communities, etc.)? What else could I do to learn more?

HOW CAN I GET TO KNOW MY STUDENTS?

WHEN STUDENTS ENTER OUR CLASSROOMS, THESE QUESTIONS CAN HELP DETERMINE THEIR PRIOR KNOWLEDGE IN ELA:

- Before coming to this facility, what were you learning about in English class?
- What did you like about English Language Arts? What did you find interesting?
- We will be studying _____. What do you know about this already?
- How much have you studied this in school before? What did you find particularly interesting?
- What do you want to know about reading, writing, literature, or other topics in ELA?

While maintaining appropriate boundaries, teachers and students in DYS facilities can get to know one another in ways that support effective learning and meaningful connections. Teachers may offer students opportunities to explore the following questions in several ways, including in a personal journal, in a letter to the teacher or another adult, in pairs within the classroom, through oral presentations, or in any other manner that is appropriate in a particular DYS setting. Teachers can then use these insights to tailor instruction and assessment to respond to students' interests.

THESE QUESTIONS MAY BE USED OR ADAPTED TO HELP US BEGIN TO KNOW OUR STUDENTS AS INDIVIDUALS:

- What TV shows do you like?
- What music do you like?
- Who is your favorite musical artist or group? Why?
- What are your favorite sports or hobbies?
- What is your favorite time of year or holiday? Why?
- How do you spend your spare time?
- What are you proud of?
- What is one dream you have?
- Is there anything else that you want people to know about you?

THESE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS CAN HELP US RECOGNIZE STUDENTS' LANGUAGE NEEDS AND BACKGROUNDS:

- What language(s) do you speak?
- If you speak more than one language, what language is spoken in your home?
- What language(s) do you read and write?
- (This question is only for students who are English Language Learners) Of all your experiences learning English, what helped you learn the best?

WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT RACE AND RACISM, ETHNICITY, CULTURE, AND CULTURAL BEHAVIOR?

As teachers, many of us have had the opportunity to explore the history of cultural diversity and racism in the United States, but there is always room for continued learning. To engage in culturally responsive teaching, we must understand how culture affects behavior, communication, and interaction.

Take time to read and learn about the histories and linguistic expressions of the specific racial, national, and ethnic groups with which our students identify. Oral histories or literary forms may not necessarily appear in traditional texts, but they are essential to building culturally responsive lessons that address our students' experiences and needs.

We must understand how culture affects behavior, communication, and interaction.

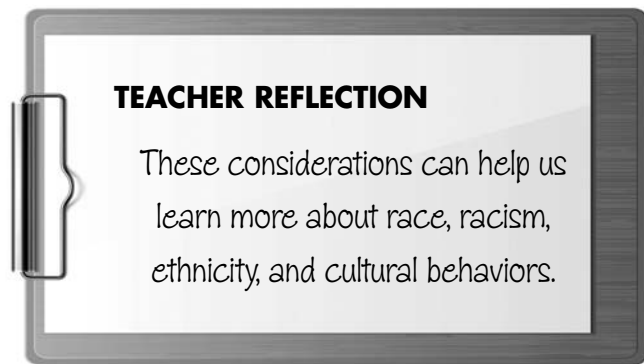
Some of us may see race or ethnicity as identities that students and teachers should "leave at the door." We may believe that race is not as important as nationality, or that race is divisive and may cause conflict. However, research has shown that our students' identities are essential parts of who they are as learners. These identities shape how they see the world and how they interact with new information.

If we attempt "not to see race" and do not invite it into the classroom, we miss an essential part of what makes students who they are. As DYS teachers, we don't want to miss an opportunity to help our students engage and achieve in school. However, we also want to be conscious that all people come with varying degrees of racial consciousness and are politicized around this consciousness differently. For example, simply because

someone is Latino does not mean that they are engaged in anti-racism activities. While we should open up the space for race, culture and ethnicity to be acknowledged in our classrooms and through the curriculum, ***we should be careful to pay attention to how our students are responding.*** Some may become angry at the institutionalized oppression and others may be indifferent, while still others may feel motivated to make an impact. Our commitment should be to move students along the continuum so that their reactions become productive, making an impact on their own life and on those around them.

If we attempt "not to see race" ...we miss an essential part of what makes students who they are.

Paulo Freire was a researcher and an educator who found that by building literacy skills in the hope of becoming more literate, people felt empowered to change the course of their own lives. Freire's research talks about the importance of praxis (or the application of learned knowledge) in the teaching and learning process. He saw education as a force of liberation, emphasizing that it is only through praxis that the learner becomes empowered to take their knowledge and impact their world (Kutz and Roskelly). When students use their knowledge and apply it by changing habits, making connections or re-envisioning their future, they have engaged in liberatory education and are able to truly feel that they have power to impact their own life.



1. How do I try to educate myself about my students' home cultures and their experiences and contributions throughout history?
2. How am I learning specific or complex details about the national or ethnic backgrounds of my students, instead of grouping all Asians, all Latinos, or all Blacks together?
3. How have I researched the role of race in American history and in its educational systems?
4. How do I reflect on my own cultural norms and school experiences, and how these inform my teaching?
5. How do I investigate how stereotypes and discrimination play a role in my own life and in my students' lives?
6. How will I use this information and knowledge to empower my students?

How We Connect to Our Students' Lives



The second of three key elements of culturally responsive teaching—How we connect to the content we teach—offers opportunities to make learning tangible and accessible to students, and to help them locate themselves within the literature and their own writing products. In the context of English Language Arts, being a culturally responsive teacher means helping our students analyze writing and themes with which they can identify. We can help students see the ways in which individuals and groups have used language to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

The content we teach must meet many criteria. As DYS teachers, we align our teaching with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks while we accommodate for a constantly changing student body and create lessons and units that will support students with a variety of skill levels and learning styles.

As we develop our mini-units from the frameworks, we can use culturally relevant themes and content to connect our students to the curriculum, remembering that we are not just teaching rules and forms, but we are also teaching students to think critically about the world around them.

... help students see the ways in which individuals and groups have used language to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

TIPS FOR CONNECTING CONTENT:

Developing questions that students can answer from their own experience confirms students' prior knowledge and awakens their curiosity about finding parallels in new ELA content.

- ▼ Provide students with opportunities to learn about topics that relate to their own cultural background from multiple points of view, including readings from authors who share their racial or ethnic identities.
- ▼ Use Daily Prompts to help students give voice to their own experiences.
- ▼ In class discussions, plan for time and offer respectful encouragement for students to integrate their own experiences.
- ▼ Do not assume that because students come from a particular cultural or ethnic background, they will have a firm understanding of the history or culture of their ancestors. Young people may not have full information about their backgrounds, or may be at different points in developing their own racial or ethnic identities. ***We should not expect a single person to represent an entire racial or ethnic group in any class discussion or debate.***

QUESTIONS ABOUT POINT OF VIEW:

Students should also understand that stories in literature and in history are re-creations of events, and always depend on the point of view of the author. Even textbooks that are designed to avoid bias are shaped by a particular set of cultural lenses, as authors and editors must decide what content will be highlighted, downplayed, included, or excluded. As educators, it's important that we teach our students to identify point of view and read critically. We are not just teaching rules and forms; we are also teaching students to think critically about the world around them.

- ▼ What is the author's background?
- ▼ Are several perspectives represented?
- ▼ Which perspectives are absent or under-represented?
- ▼ How would an author from a different perspective have chosen to tell the same story?

WHAT KINDS OF CONNECTIONS MAKE CONTENT MORE MEANINGFUL?

Fundamentally, teaching becomes more culturally responsive when we build our lessons and units on students' prior knowledge—including the knowledge that is related to their backgrounds, interests, and experiences.

These techniques help identify students' prior knowledge and interests:

- ▼ Surveys for students to fill out upon entering your class;
- ▼ Quick evaluations after each lesson or mini-unit;
- ▼ KWL (**K**now, **W**ant to know, **L**earned) charts and inventories;
- ▼ Providing time, encouragement, and emotional safety in the classroom so that students can connect the learning with their own experiences;
- ▼ Various methods for pre- and post-testing with each mini-unit.

When curriculum is connected to students' interests, strengths and experiences outside of the classroom, students are more engaged and successful in school. In the book, *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom*, Lisa Delpit suggests building upon tangible interests, such as hairstyles and sports, as well as more complex topics such as discrimination. It is equally important to consider and value a student's home language in the classroom, and we can legitimize a student's home language in many ways. Students' experiences are legitimized when they are made part of the curriculum, and we can build upon the students' existing knowledge to teach more difficult skills that are necessary for success.

Meaningful teaching helps students understand the world as it is and then equips them to change it for the better. When students or their families suffer discrimination because of race, language, or class they need to understand the root causes of discrimination. Then they need to be equipped with ways to respond: to resist stereotypes and work against oppression in constructive and successful ways. Through the curriculum, students can come to understand how power has operated throughout history and familiarize themselves with systems of power and the rules that go along with that power.

These techniques help us make content more relevant to our students' lives:

- ▼ Use Daily Prompts to connect the curriculum to students' prior knowledge.
- ▼ Explore the themes in the chapter on organizing ELA content for examples of overarching concepts and essential questions that relate to students' lives and prior knowledge.
- ▼ Emphasize the Key Elements of Instruction for professional development in DYS, as outlined in this guide's Introduction.
- ▼ Establish protocols that use ELA concepts to develop life skills; for example, host Socratic dialogue sessions or create a multi-step process for problem solving in the classroom.
- ▼ Publish student work so that students see themselves as meaningful participants in both the classroom and the larger learning community.

CONNECTING STUDENT WORK TO AN AUDIENCE

Reaching an audience also increases student motivation. Publishing students' work can be as simple as posting essays or projects on a wall and inviting students and staff to view the work and write short comments on a blank page posted as part of the exhibit. Teachers can also create opportunities for students to reach an audience by writing letters to authors, challenging viewpoints and supporting their own arguments, creating a role-play or skit to perform in class, designing a comic book to be shared with other classes, or contributing to a newsletter that is periodically "published" through the use of a photocopier.

1. How does my lesson or mini-unit build on my students' prior knowledge?
2. How does the content I am teaching relate to my students' ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds?
3. How can my students identify with the experiences of the people we are learning about? Am I helping them draw connections?
4. How am I helping the students in my class to identify oppression? Am I empowering them to see positive and successful ways to address oppression and other problems throughout the history we are learning?
5. How does the theme I am teaching relate to the experiences of my students? (For example, can I use "Rights and Responsibilities" as a theme in the curriculum to help them explore rights and responsibilities in their own lives?)
6. How do I help students learn about their own histories in ways that help them identify and understand their current situations?
7. How am I demonstrating to students how they can link classroom skills to real-life applications?
8. How do I help students access information that helps them learn more about their cultural, ethnic, or racial backgrounds?
9. How am I helping students learn about other cultures so they can see and value both commonalities and diversity among groups?
10. How am I helping students think critically, conduct research, and solve problems?
11. How do I seek and find ways for students to publish and find real audiences for their work?

TEACHER REFLECTION

Considering these questions can help us make culturally responsive connections to content.

How We Interact with Our Students



The third element of culturally responsive teaching—How we interact with our students—recognizes that mutual respect is the foundation for student motivation, engagement, and success. We create a “climate of success” in our classrooms by reinforcing, on a daily basis, the belief that all students are capable of success.

As culturally responsive educators, we acknowledge and use students’ prior knowledge and cultural backgrounds to help us prepare our lessons and connect to content in meaningful ways. Through interaction, we also acknowledge the academic and personal strengths that our students bring to our classroom. Explicit classroom norms should emphasize the importance of respectful interaction, while predictable routines engage active participation and help students build on their skills and abilities.

EMOTIONAL SAFETY AND MUTUAL RESPECT

An emotionally safe classroom employs explicit classroom rules based on mutual respect. While the rules in a DYS classroom must always be aligned with program rules, teachers can tailor their own classroom rules with knowledge of the students’ own definitions of respect. To help reinforce emotional safety and mutual respect, remember that:

- ◆ Students may need support in meeting classroom and program norms because they may differ from what is reflected in their homes, or they may refuse to comply with a school culture that has previously disrespected their home culture;
- ◆ Some students may act out because they may not know how to operate effectively in a dominant culture that differs from their own.

MODELS OF SUCCESS

Students are more successful when teachers affirm their cultural identities and link their home cultures to success in school. Marcos Pizarro, in his study of diverse students of Mexican descent, found that the most successful students had teachers or other role models who saw their identity in a positive way and connected their culture with success in learning (Nieto and Bode). An illustration of this positive association is provided by the Garfield High School math teacher made famous by the film, *Stand and Deliver*. In this film, Jaime Escalante emphatically told his students, most of whom were Latino, **that they had no choice but to succeed:**

“You have math in your blood. The Mayans invented zero!”

As culturally responsive teachers, we must see students’ culture and language as strengths and show examples of people who share our students’ ethnic identities and have achieved academic success.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

The message should be clear that students are intelligent and bring positive assets to the classroom, even if they have struggled with academics in the past. When teachers hold high expectations for all students, and provide them with support to accomplish challenging tasks, students will rise to the challenge.

Asa Hilliard III, co-author of *Young, Gifted and Black*, noted that teachers consistently give better instruction to students that they consider to be intelligent. When teachers believed that a particular student was intelligent, they not only showed more “benefit of the doubt” when grading assignments, they demonstrated their high expectations by:

- ◆ Providing longer waiting time after asking a question;
- ◆ Offering better clues if the student was experiencing difficulty;
- ◆ Giving students more feedback and attention.

CARING AND CONFIRMING—WITHOUT COMPROMISING STANDARDS

If a student does not meet an academic or behavioral standard, that should be communicated to the student immediately. Assignments and work products can be adjusted to suit each students’ background and preparedness, but interactions must be consistent and fair to all students.

- ◆ In conversation with students, communicate your belief that they can meet the expectations and that you care and want to help them to succeed.
- ◆ Learn about and practice accountable talk which clarifies expectations and builds a sense of accomplishment. This can be as simple as changing a question from “Can I?” to “How can I?”
- ◆ Try to ascertain why the student did not succeed, and then:
 - ◆ If the assignment was too difficult, scaffold your lessons, building in more visuals and graphic organizers, and outlining the concepts. Break tasks into discreet steps, with clear instructions, support, and feedback at each step;
 - ◆ If the assignment was not too difficult, try to increase motivation through communicating that you expect better performance, and by linking the work more closely to the student’s interests, goals, and background;
 - ◆ If the assignment was too easy, speak individually with students to let them know you see that they are ready for more significant challenges. Provide students with alternative readings and writing tasks that focus on the same topic as the rest of the class and better match their learning levels; this enables all students to participate in class discussions and share their knowledge with other students.

HOW CAN I CREATE A CLIMATE OF SUCCESS?

Learning occurs when students perceive that they are valued as a member of the learning community, that teachers believe in them, and that they are expected to succeed. To be effective teachers and encourage student engagement, we need to build caring relationships that are informed by knowledge of the students' cultural background, previous experiences and personal strengths. For students to invest in learning and participating, they must experience positive affirming interactions with their teachers and classmates on a consistent basis. This precept is basic to culturally responsive teaching, but it is far from new; in fact, it mirrors the age-old adage that:

"Students don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

Care and respect are conveyed in a number of ways. In particular, all aspects of the classroom environment come into play in establishing care and respect. The Classroom Self-Tour on the facing page invites us to look at our classrooms with new eyes, and see whether our classroom settings demonstrate the beliefs, learning opportunities, and support that we hope to share with our students.

1. How am I creating an atmosphere in my classroom where my students feel welcomed and emotionally safe?
2. How am I helping students identify the strengths they have from their own life experiences?
3. How do I maintain clear, high expectations for all my students?
4. How am I finding ways to make connections with my students?
5. How am I valuing each student's intelligence and the way it can be a resource in the classroom?
6. How am I giving appropriate wait time and guidance to answer questions and meet expectations?
7. How have I asked students how they want to be respected, and told them how I want to be respected?
8. How do I make my expectations explicit, firm, and consistent?
9. How am I giving students positive messages about who they are individually, and linking their homecultures with success in learning?
10. How do I model behavior that supports a positive learning environment?



TEACHER REFLECTION

Considering these questions helps us focus on interactions that foster and demonstrate respect.

Classroom Self-Tour

Seeing your classroom with new eyes

Entrance

What is the first message students get when they enter the room?
Are students greeted verbally and with eye contact when they enter? Are they greeted by name?
Is it possible to scan the room quickly to get a feel for students' state of mind?
Are there Daily Prompts or other "do now" activities that help students focus immediately?

Seating

What does the seating arrangement communicate about who will be talking?
Can seating arrangements be changed to facilitate each lesson's main activity?
Can the students make eye contact easily during discussions?
During working sessions, can students easily collaborate?
During tests, can students work alone?

Walls

Are key words, questions and concepts posted?
Are objectives and themes clearly posted?
When students' eyes wander, what are they seeing or learning?
Is diversity affirmed through quotes and posters from a wide range of speakers?
Is there a visual display of the ways in which students will be assessed on the content?
Are skills such as writing processes and reading strategies outlined and visible to students?
Is student work displayed to honor successful students and provide all students with models?

Materials

Are materials displayed in a visually pleasing manner to increase interest?
Do readings represent a variety of perspectives and a diverse set of authors?
Do classroom materials include graphic organizers and other scaffolding tools?
Are interesting reading materials available if students want to pick up something to read?
Do classroom materials include primary sources from which students draw their own conclusions?

Activities

Do teaching techniques include the use of diverse approaches like role-plays, art, or music?
Are there regular conferences with students to monitor their progress and engagement?
Can students make a choice among topics or products they may pursue?
Are students engaged and participating in classroom activities?
Are activities changed often to keep students' interest high?

Assessment

Are students really learning? How is their progress measured?
Is student learning assessed before, during, and after units are taught?
Are lessons informed by the data that emerges from student assessments?
Are diverse methods of assessment used to get a clear view of student understanding?

Moving Forward

Culturally relevant teaching holds the promise of making a real difference in the lives of our students. DYS teachers already use some of these culturally responsive teaching strategies on a daily basis.

To learn more and enrich your knowledge about culturally responsive teaching, talk with colleagues and your Instructional Coach, continue to seek professional development opportunities on this topic, and refer to the print and online resources included in this guide. Reflecting on our teaching and connecting the curriculum to our students' identities, interests and knowledge helps our students better understand ELA and think more critically about the world around them.

With your dedication and support, our students will see themselves as living history and learn that they can be active, valued members of society, equipped with the tools they need to improve their lives and ultimately, their world.

*Share your practices
and invite others to observe
your classroom. Build on
the strength of the work
you already do!*

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FINDING THE NEWEST PUBLICATIONS AND CLASSROOM MATERIALS

www.teachingforchange.org

Teaching for Change offers an online catalog of books, posters, videos and CDs to build a culturally responsive classroom library.

www.rethinkingschools.org

Rethinking Schools Online offers a quarterly magazine, and a comprehensive index of research articles, web resources, and publications on critical topics in school reform.

www.crede.ucsc.edu

Through this website, the **Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE)** offers a number of resources and tools for teachers and students to learn more and further explore ways to support linguistic and cultural minority students.

www.edchange.org/multicultural

Multicultural Pavilion is an interactive site that provides resources to teachers to explore and discuss multicultural education including awareness activities, dialogue forums, and a number of other opportunities for teachers to engage in collaborative learning experiences.